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RSC BRIEFING

6 JUNE 1954

DEVELOPMENTS IN KOREA

- I. Quinoun note in Korea is fact that President Rhee's refusal to acknowledge popular dissatisfaction is increasing support for his political opposition and may well make discontented South Koreans susceptible to propaganda from Commie North.
 - A. In 13 May election, Rhee ran against dead man and ex-Communist; won by only 53% (compared to 75% in '52).
 - B. His running mate, Yi, lost by 300,000 to John Chang, despite blatant police support for Rhee-Yi ticket.
- II. Rhee, however, calls opposition vote mere popular "stir" and plans no major changes in government policy despite loud demands for reform.
 - A. Will brook no interference from unwelcome Vice President Chang. Has attempted to smear him as pro-Communist, and may try to eliminate VP's rights of succession.
 - B. Assassination of Chang--or even Rhee--possible.
 - C. Popular dissatisfaction at new high: defections from ROK Army reported sharply increased.
- III. Meanwhile, North Koreans are beating drum for "peaceful reunification"; have announced impending army cut of 80,000 (in contrast to Rhee's demands for march north).
 - A. Today's (7 June) withdrawal of NSMC Teams from S. Korea will make further propaganda for Communists.
 - B. Communists could make further hay, at any time, by pulling more Chinese troops out of North Korea. Chinese are already down to 300,000 (from '52 level of 900,000); further cuts would not effect Communist security, since Chinese could be back on front line in matter of days.

DOCUMENT NO. _____
NO CHANGE IN CLASS. ☐
DECLASSIFIED
CLASS. CHANGED TO: TS S C
NEXT REVIEW DATE:
AUTH: HR 70-2
DATE: 1/18/80

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NSC BRIEFING

6 JUNE 1954

DEVELOPMENTS IN KOREA

- I. Ominous note in Korea is fact that President Rhee's refusal to acknowledge popular dissatisfaction is increasing support for his political opposition and may well make discontented South Koreans susceptible to propaganda from Communist North.
 - A. In 15 May election, Rhee ran against dead man and ex-Communist; won by only 50% (compared to 75% in '52).
 - B. His running mate, Yi, lost by 200,000 to John Chang, despite blatant police support for Rhee-Yi ticket.
- II. Rhee, however, calls opposition vote mere popular "whim" and plans no major changes in government policy despite loud demands for reform.
 - A. Will brook no interference from unwelcome Vice President Chang. Has attempted to smear him as pro-Communist, and may try to eliminate VP's rights of succession.
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RNC DAILYING

6 June 1956

DEVELOPMENTS IN KOREA

1. In South Korea, President Rhee is blandly ignoring the demonstration of substantial opposition strength that came to light in the 15 May elections. As a result, political instability and increased domestic unrest in the south is opening the door for North Korean propaganda favoring "peaceful unification".

2. As had been expected, Rhee won reelection to the Presidency on 15 May, but his margin in his race against a dead man and an ex-Communist dropped to 56% of the popular vote (as opposed to 75% in '52). His vice-presidential running mate--Assembly speaker Yi Ki-pung--was edged out at the polls (3.3 million to 4 million) by the Democratic Candidate, John M. Chang, a former premier and Ambassador to the US. This defeat occurred despite blatant police support for the Rhee-Yi ticket.

A. The defeat of Yi--one of a triumvirate of pro-US officials which has acted as a stabilizing substructure beneath the aging Rhee-- will diminish his influence and prestige in the Assembly, although he continues to enjoy Rhee's support.

B. The second triumvirate member, Defense Minister Son, has come under attack by Assembly members and has now been removed from office by Rhee.

C. Recent reports from Seoul state that the third member, Chief of Staff Cheng, is also slated for replacement.

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3. Thus a power vacuum at the second level is making its appearance in South Korea and factional rivalries are being stimulated at a time when popular dissatisfaction has reached unprecedented heights. Meanwhile, Rhee himself has ignored demands for reform, and has indicated that he regards the opposition vote as no more than a popular "whim". He plans no major changes in government policy. Instead, he has devoted the post-election period thusfar to strengthening the Liberal Party and police.

A. With regard to his unwelcome vice-president, Chang, Rhee has declared he will brook no interference from him in the affairs of government. He has attempted to smear Chang--a prominent Catholic layman--as a pro-Communist, and may try to legislate the Vice Presidential rights of succession out of existence. In light of South Korea's bloody political history, an assassination attempt against Chang--or against Rhee himself--is an increasing possibility.

B. As a payoff for services rendered, Rhee has promoted a number of police officials and made a notorious tough, "Tiger" Kim, director of the National Police.

C. Rhee has named two assemblymen to Cabinet posts--the first time that members of the Assembly have been given such office. His ouster of Defense Minister Son and Economic Coordinator Park Ta-chin is viewed as a further effort to forestall a Liberal Party revolt in the assembly.

4. Not all of South Korea's growing discontent can be attributed to Rhee's imperious rule--the nation's poor living standards and its continuing division are largely beyond Rhee's control. However, popular resentment of Rhee's regime, and particularly his refusal to accept the election results as a mandate for reform, can be expected to increase South Korea's susceptibility to propaganda from the North.

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Approved For Release 2002/05/07 : CIA-RDP79R00890A000700060009-5

A. As part of its propaganda campaign, the North Korean regime has announced a forthcoming reduction of 30,000 in North Korean troop strength and is emphasizing its "desire" for "peaceful reunification", in contrast to Rhee's periodic demands for a march north. Such propaganda may be increasingly effective if such South Korean morale continues to deteriorate.

B. The Communists will seek to make further propaganda out of today's (7 June) withdrawal of UNMC teams from South Korea.

C. Another propaganda gesture available to the Communists would be the announcement of new withdrawals of Chinese troops from Korea.

A. Since the 1953 armistice, the Chinese Communists have steadily pulled out large numbers of troops from Korea. From about 900,000 at the time of the '53 truce, Chinese strength in North Korea has been reduced to about 300,000.

B. Further withdrawals could take place at any time without significant effect on Communist security. Chinese troops deployed in Manchuria and North China (presently numbering 350,000) could return to the Korean front line in a matter of days.

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